

Around the nation's mystic core: interactions between political concepts and the literary imagination in the works of Stanisław Brzozowski

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Abstract The essay examines Stanisław Brzozowski's ideas on mutual interactions between the sphere of culture and the realm of the political. It shows how Brzozowski made use of literary texts in order to elucidate social and political processes. In doing so, he insisted on a specific form of knowledge accessible through texts of literature and literary criticism, which are not limited by the mere "logic of notions." Following Vico and Sorel Brzozowski detected an "irrational core" at the bases of human collectivities such as above all modern nations, and it is through literature that this core can be revealed. Brzozowski's understanding of political ideas and concepts is informed—to a decisive degree—by the literary imagination. This can be shown by a semantic and rhetorical analysis of some of his later writings.

Keywords Brzozowski · Legend of Modern Poland · Voices in the Night · The political · Literary imagination · Critical discourse

In the present article I will deal with the intersections between Stanisław Brzozowski's political ideas and his writings in the domain of literary and cultural criticism. It is widely known that Brzozowski actively participated in the political life of his time, he collaborated with left wing journals devoting various articles and essays to the analysis of the social and political implications of literature and literary criticism in Poland. Obviously, his involvement in the political struggles of his time was reflected in his philosophical works as well as in his works of fiction. My purpose is to take a closer look at the forms and the structural properties of these

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manifold interrelations between Brzozowski's political ideas and his thoughts on the role of literature and literary criticism in European societies of his time, above all in Poland. I am especially interested in Brzozowski's ideas concerning the mutual interactions between culture or literature on the one hand and politics and history on the other, and I will consider the application of these ideas, in particular in his late collection of essays *Voices in the Night* (first published posthumously in 1912). I will try to show that the content of Brzozowski's political ideas was in fact often of secondary importance compared to the dominating role of categories and images from the sphere of literary imagination.¹ Political ideology turns out to be, if not a byproduct, then at least partly an effect of certain factors which are not of political provenience. This implies that the often nebulous contours of Brzozowski's political thought can be and should be viewed in the context of literary rhetoric and literary imagination. This holds especially for such key notions in Brzozowski's writings as "collectivity" (*zbiorowość*), "nation," and "culture."

Literature as a source of knowledge

At the beginning of his major work *The Legend of Young Poland. Studies on the Cultural Soul* (1910) Brzozowski notes that:

[...] Kasprowicz, Przybyszewski, Wyspiański, Żeromski, Staff, Irzykowski have merged with the logic of the life of our society to such an extent that one could simply deduce them from this life. (Brzozowski 1997, pp. 28–29)

Even if in the following sentence Brzozowski informs us that this is "undoubtedly a delusion," it appears that this statement contains the nucleus of his analysis of contemporary Polish culture carried out on the pages of the above-mentioned work. Brzozowski is dealing with the link between the products of the mind and "collective life" (*współżycie ludzkie*). He is entirely convinced that this link exists, although his deliberations show that any attempt at a closer definition of this link raises considerable methodological problems. The entire *Legend of Young Poland* as well as the articles from the collection *Voices in the Night* are informed by the more or less implicit assumption that the works of this or that author can serve as starting point for far-reaching 'deductions' regarding the form, the condition, and the future fate of the collective life of a given culture, but Brzozowski does not share with us the reflections which led him to this assumption. For him, the value of literature as a source of knowledge about the form and function of political communities is beyond any doubt; hence his idea that a scrupulous examination of cultural factors offers insight into the mechanisms of social and political life.

Thus, for instance, in his article on "The crisis in Russian literature" (from: *Voices in the Night*) Brzozowski postulates a teleological line "from Kant and

¹ The predominance of purely ideological approaches in the study of Brzozowski's text has been put into question already long ago, most effectively in Michał Głowiński's essay "Wielka parataksa" (Głowiński 1991).

Schiller—to Bismarck” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 174), which allows him to draw a conclusion by analogy with the situation in Russia, where, according to him, the current state of literature and mind can serve “the in-depth investigator” as a basis for predictions concerning the subsequent political or historical “crystallization” of these fictionally represented features. What for the moment is visible only in literature will later become history, for literature has a privileged access to the “psyche” of a given cultural community; it can disclose the “inner essence” of the political “organism” known as Russia (Brzozowski 2007, p. 174).

It is important to note that although Brzozowski ascribed a primary role to literature as an epistemological access to the understanding of political processes, it is still the latter that interested him most of all. He was concerned above all about future political and historical “crystallizations.” All the cultural features he analysed so thoroughly serve only as material to highlight the “psychic” factors which later will assume shape in the sphere of the political: “I tried to argue that the Russian *state* was always the body of this rebellious soul which gains voice in Russian literature” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 198).

It is quite telling that Brzozowski was not able to provide a strict definition of the linking mechanism between the “psyche” in its literary manifestations and its future political “crystallizations.” However, this did not hinder him from formulating wide-reaching considerations as to the social and political consequences of this or that cultural phenomenon. The methodological foundation of these deductions remains hidden beyond the grasp of rational notions. Thus Brzozowski (referring to Ernest Renan and Georges Sorel) wrote of a “mystic, mythological core,” of some “irreducible quid” enclosed in the notion of the “fatherland” (Brzozowski 1997, pp. 88–89); or he states that a “society that does not exist as a half instinctive, inexplicable, irrational state of mind of its members will not accomplish anything, finds itself in a state of decomposition” (Brzozowski 1997, p. 89).

Lacking a neat description of the linking mechanism between works of art and political processes we have to focus on the parallels between the two spheres as implied in Brzozowski’s observations. Two things are worth noting here. Firstly, Brzozowski saw society as a structure which must constantly strive forward, must aspire to attain a higher degree of perfection, and would inevitably be doomed to fail if it did not fully engage itself in this constant forward motion (for which reason he claimed that societies are always threatened unless their members engage in an incessant struggle against weakness and decomposition). And secondly, Brzozowski indicated that when dealing with culture (or with a “cultural soul”) we have to be aware of the fact that at its basis lies a sphere which does not submit to conceptual representation. That is to say, Brzozowski resorts to a sort of logical ‘double bookkeeping’: “one has to be able to distinguish,” he writes in the *Legend of Young Poland*, “the living, active logic from the one-dimensional logic of notions” (Brzozowski 1997, p. 89). Obviously, Brzozowski is interested above all in this “living” logic, i.e., in what he describes as the “irrational fact of life” (Brzozowski 1997, p. 90).

At the very basis of the political Brzozowski spotted an element of irrationality. This element can best be seen through the prism of cultural artifacts, and it is most fully accessible through the analysis of literary texts. This is why he ascribed such a

high degree of political responsibility to the profession of literary criticism and also why he placed such high demands on Polish literature and culture. It is important to note that Brzozowski's idea of literature as providing access to the hidden but substantial layers of a "national soul" was less than original in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century criticism. In fact, even academic literary criticism of the time often saw literature as the embodiment of national characteristics, as being a refined expression of what was included, according to these basically post-romantic ideas, in the very essence of the language of this or that national or proto-national community. But Brzozowski's strong emphasis on the irrational knowledge provided by literature went far beyond these ideas. In his creative readings of Polish and European writers of the time, he clearly transgressed the limits of positivist criticism. Moreover, he rejects "the dogmas of Cartesian rationalism" (Walicki 1989, p. 123) and appeals to a more profound understanding of human culture, an understanding that takes into account historical circumstances as well as man's capacity for creating new notions and realities which transcend his present situation. One of the forbearers of this way of thinking is, of course, Giambattista Vico, whose influence on Brzozowski's thinking about history and society can hardly be overestimated. Following his 'discovery' of the Italian philosopher in 1906 Brzozowski wrote: "Vico brilliantly understood this artificiality and superficiality of Cartesianism," "Vico was the only thinker who fundamentally overcame intellectualism and extra-historical rationalism," to quote only two of a whole series of enthusiastic accounts of Vico in Brzozowski's writings (Brzozowski 1990a, p. 299). It was in fact Vico who spoke of a specifically "poetic wisdom," a primordial form of "metaphysics not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined" (Vico 1948, p. 104; par. 375), which he situated at the very beginning of human civilization. Obviously Brzozowski did not state that the mytho-poetic knowledge he traced in the works of nineteenth century writers is primitive or pre-rational; what attracted him in Vico's conception is the idea that the scale of our potential knowledge about human history and culture should not be reduced to a formal Cartesian knowledge. And this is, of course, what fascinated Brzozowski in the works of other modernist philosophers he admired: Henri Bergson, Georges Sorel (Brzozowski 1970, vol. 1, p. 740). In his concrete application of the irrational "core" Brzozowski paid tribute to Sorel's concept of "social myth" (Brzozowski 1997, pp. 113–115), a combination of images which serve to exert an influence on a present society intending to create the future (Sorel 1990, p. 119). This myth can be entirely irrational, but it still determines political acts in a given historical situation. It is this irrationality and its future-looking, performative orientation that links this myth to Brzozowski's understanding of literature.

Literature, nation, and modernity

Hence Brzozowski's "irreducible quid" is nothing else than the basic element of political communities, i.e. it serves as the ground for the emergence of the political and it underlies the mechanisms of the latter. Brzozowski demanded that a

community of people sharing a common culture struggle against the inhuman element and jointly create its future. It is here that we can observe a link between Brzozowski's philosophy of labor and his ideas on the nation and national culture. As Andrzej Walicki pointed out, we can observe a certain shift in the late Brzozowski's ideas on labor, culture, and society. From approximately 1908 on the central point of reference is no longer humanity as such, but rather a particular nation or the "fatherland" (Walicki 2011, p. 149; Walicki 1989, pp. 267–268). Now the conscious creation is imagined exclusively in the framework of a concrete community, a community forged by a common culture, a common past, and hence a common "cultural soul."

"I was impressed by the Italians' cult for Carducci and by the poet himself," Brzozowski writes in a letter to Salomea Perlmutter in 1907, and he continues: "A nation that is able to honor such writers, who recognizes such writers as their educators, such a nation lives and will live" (Listy, vol. 1, pp. 298–299). And it is above all Poland Brzozowski was concerned about. In his *Contemporary Literary Criticism in Poland* we find the following appeal: "Polish writers, at least, write in such a way that it would be worth dying for your words" (Brzozowski 1907, p. 54). Thus Brzozowski underscored the indissoluble link between literature and community. What does not serve to strengthen the community is deprived of all value. "Polish writers!," he appealed, "[w]e have to be a nation! We have to create a consciousness which allows modern man to live and develop – do you understand? This is a question of life and death and of our action" (Brzozowski 1907, p. 54). "Nation," "modernity," "life and death"—these are the notions with which Brzozowski worked out his conception of literature and of literary criticism. It is obvious that in the light of such 'heavy' words the discourse of literary criticism gains relevance, acquires a performative value, for the whole issue of the "life and death" of a nation is now fought out on the battle ground of literature. However the ideological content of these key categories remains unclear, even if Brzozowski was vehement that the "nation is not an abstraction—not an empty notion, but a reality: it has created our soul" (Brzozowski 1970, vol. 2, p. 238).

The nation and the rhetoric of criticism

The same Brzozowski who continuously criticized "Young Poland" and its representatives for their empty "phrases," their "malaria dreams" (Brzozowski 2007, p. 54), and their general lack of contact with reality, did not seem to worry much about definitions of the basic concepts of his theory of culture. The persuasive power of his statements is entirely based on their performative orientation, i.e. on the *appeal* that something has to be built, created, produced, as well as on the high degree of urgency ascribed to this appeal. If we do not create this new culture in time, says Brzozowski, we risk a catastrophic decline of this very culture. But what exactly has to be built, in which way, and to what purpose? Brzozowski preferred not to respond to such questions that inevitably come to mind as one reads his essays. He stated only implicitly that a collectivity (society, culture, nation—this

terminology is not always neatly systematized in his writings) is doomed to fail if it does not submit to the imperative of incessant self-creation and forward striving.

It is highly instructive to see how Brzozowski programmatically replaced semantic meaning by external, functional motifs such as ‘movement’, ‘struggle’, ‘creation’. According to him, we have to be aware that the “content” of words does not exist “for itself beyond them” (Brzozowski 1997, p. 94). Thus sociological and political notions are used in a highly metaphorical, so to say ‘poetical’ way. In *Voices in the Night*, evoking the “psyche” of Russian history and society, Brzozowski wrote that, when we submit to this psyche, “we subordinate ourselves not to its ideal content, but to the life of the nation from which this psyche [*psychika*] emerged” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 175). It is the opposition between “ideal content” and “the life of the nation” that astounds here. Brzozowski argued that there is a certain fundamental sphere in political thought, a sphere beyond all definite content. And it this sphere, which will determine Russia’s future historical and political reality. Obviously it is impossible to prove scientifically the existence of this causal link, which is why Brzozowski placed the accent on the performative orientation of his thesis. “It is difficult to write: it would be easy to explain this in speaking,” he excuses the blurriness of his ideas in a letter to his friend Salomea Perlmutter (Brzozowski 1970, vol. 2, p. 249).

Given the programmatic ambiguity of Brzozowski’s key concepts, it is not surprising that his writings are dense with all sorts of paraphrases. When we look closer at them they often reveal a somewhat tautological character:

This volume is only an approximation, rather a series of approximations to what today is nothing but a presentiment, a chaotic attempt, and what must become the new organ of belief of modern man. (Brzozowski 2007, p. 105)

Or, from the same paragraph: „Man must know himself as he has made himself” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 105). Were it not for the shift on the time axis (what is, is not what it is but what it will become) these phrases would indeed read as pure tautologies. But this shift is the decisive performative element, which is so characteristic of Brzozowski’s rhetoric. What is now is never entirely self-identical for it already contains a future hypostasis which is yet to be realized. It is this process he is interested in and not so much the entities which are implied in it.²

For Brzozowski one ideal representative of a “real modern formation” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 235) was Maurycy Mochnacki. In this writer, publicist, and political activist of the romantic epoch Brzozowski sees an embodiment of everything he tries to express in his own writings, namely the attempt “to create a clear, conscious, organized national will” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 235). But as soon as we take a closer look at the main features of Mochnacki’s ideal modernity (as presented by Brzozowski), we are again confronted with a strikingly flexible handling of theoretical concepts. Thus Brzozowski frankly admits:

During the time when he was influenced by the philosophy of nature, Mochnacki could happen to write this or that sentence which contradicts what

² Ryszard Nycz aptly observed, that Brzozowski’s “poetics of culture” is governed by “the mechanism of a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Nycz 2002, p. 135).

I am saying here; but nevertheless the style of his thought was always based on the idea *that freedom arises from a reality that has come to be known, been thought through [...]*. (Brzozowski 2007, p. 234)

When Brzozowski took the liberty of interpreting Mochnicki's writings in a sense that might even contradict the verbal meaning of the texts, he did so because he presumed that this reading is legitimized by some higher meaning:

The enduring educational significance of this kind of writer does not depend on the special time-bound content of his works. What acts here is the form of his will, for will and thought are the same for him. (Brzozowski 2007, p. 236)

So "will" and "thought" are the same—but what *are* they finally? Brzozowski did not tell us, because he was exclusively concerned about the higher intention, about the specific performative movement that he ascribed to the works of Maurycy Mochnicki. He tried to grasp this movement with the help of some cloudy periphrases. Thus he wrote of the "form of the general will" or of the "basic relation to life" (Brzozowski 2007, p. 236). It is quite characteristic of Brzozowski that for a reading striving to attain the 'form of the will' the text need not be present to hand: „As I write I do not have Mochnicki's writings at hand and I can rely solely on the vivid and clear memories I derived from reading them" (Brzozowski 2007, p. 237).

The Polish writer Karol Irzykowski, in analyzing the programmatic obscurity of Brzozowski's ideas, noted that the latter was above all fascinated by the "mystery of the heroic will and irrational effort," and he added:

Pursuing the definition of this *x* Brzozowski abandoned or confused all concrete tasks. He came to a state where his philosophy can serve as a justification and foundation for a politics of every shade of colour, the aesthetics of any school, any type of ethics. (Irzykowski 1913, p. 268)

Brzozowski suspended the problem of 'truth' or 'comprehensibility' and transferred it to the process of setting something in motion, of conferring a direction to a certain form or idea. That is why in his theoretical texts we so often find the element of "touchstone" (pl. "sprawdzian"). The binary, distinctive structure of these touchstones (either/or, yes/no, life/death etc.) allowed him to delineate the limits of his concepts. The definition of this or that idea, of this or that value by the help of a touchstone is always occasional, punctual, and never leads to an essential definition; the result is always a rather momentary description from a functional point of view.

In its functional structure the 'touchstone' (we could also render it as 'criterion') is a key element of what Marta Wyka has described as Brzozowski's "antonymic thinking" (Wyka 1984, p. 243). It is a means to sharpen antagonisms and to escalate conflicts—conflicts located in the realm of criticism as well as in the real historical world. Here and there, we have the same decisionistic structure, the same "yes or no," "life or death," "victory or defeat" (Brzozowski 1997, p. 110). It appears that a deeper analysis of this operational figure can give us a better understanding of the irrational "core" which, according to the late Brzozowski, ensures the coherence of

the national community. The idea of the nation implies an external frontier behind which something else begins, something which has to be fought against in order to warrant the stability and the future well-being of the nation. In the earlier stages of Brzozowski's thought, this struggle was linked less to the national community than to an inhuman factor—nature or the elements, unorganized chaos, which have to be controlled and domesticated by labor. In his later writings, however, these ideas were very much focused on the concept of the nation; the emphasis lay on heroism, on force and collectivity, and on strengthening Poland's position in Europe: "What is required today is the creation of Poland as a victorious force which reigns over the world, a Poland of scholars, workers, artists. [...] Something of a soldier has always to be in every Pole." (Brzozowski 1997, pp. 197, 210, cf. p. 450).

The touchstone defines the external boundaries of a certain notion, of a community or a national culture. In this way it refers to the sphere of the political as well as to the sphere of literature and culture, and it guarantees the inner coherence and stability of this nation or culture. At least this is the way Brzozowski understood culture and nation, and this explains why both are so indissolubly linked in his *Legend of Young Poland*. "Culture" is the sphere in which the nation expresses itself, creates itself, gains consciousness of itself, and so the political demands placed on the nation in the late nineteenth century were applied by Brzozowski to the sphere of culture with, as a result, a sometimes strikingly 'military' vocabulary in his depiction of cultural phenomena.

The fictitiousness of political discourse and the reality of literature

When reading *The Legend of Young Poland* one might well think that questions of literature and aesthetics were considered by its author as mere deviations from the 'real' questions that are located in the realm of the political. This, however, would be a mistaken reading. I would not go so far as to postulate an "autonomy" of literature in Brzozowski's critical conception (cf. Głowiński 1991, p. 52), but it is clear that if literature is the principal medium for the self-expression of culture and thus for the creation of a modern nation, then the shape and structure of this nation is inevitably informed by literary categories. In fact, Brzozowski considers literature as not just a deviation from historical or political realities. It is a prism affording insight into undercurrents that would otherwise remain beyond our field of vision. Literature makes visible the irrational core of political communities, for literature is in itself a product of this very core; its language is an expression of the same irrationality; its 'wisdom' is the primordial wisdom to which the rise of the modern state can be traced.

That is why literature is in a way more real than the superficial manifestations we regard as political 'reality'. One can think here of Brzozowski's ideas concerning the "fictitious" character of political discourse: "For the politician [...] it is not life that exists but the imaginations of life that are popular in today's democratic circles." However, "a critic and literary historian can ascertain that the sense of psychic reality, its deep meaning and demonic truth, never goes hand in hand with popularity in the camp of the opposition." Hence true writers and poets "serve real

life and not the construction of *fata morganas*, superstitions, and political fictions” (Brzozowski 1990a, p. 290).

Examining Alexander Herzen's polemical talent in *Voices in the Night*, Brzozowski stated that the Russian writer “adjusts (*aranżuje*) neither his enemies nor his allies” to the needs of his own argumentation, but rather “retrieves the inner drama of both and through them searches for truth.” And then he added:

Herzen polemicizes like Shakespeare when he created Caliban, Richard III, Polonius, Iago or Shylock. Nicolas I, Katkov, and a whole gallery of Russian notables remain in Herzen's works as Dante's political enemies in the *Divine Comedy*. He hounded Alexander II as an Erinye, as the spirit of Hamlet's father. (Brzozowski 2007, p. 151)

What Herzen did in his polemical (i.e. politically orientated) articles can be adequately described only by resorting to literary references: He did not distort the opinions of his adversaries but mimetically reproduced them. In the paragraph following the one cited above, Brzozowski, in comparing Herzen to Marx, writes that in the latter's works “people have not blood in their veins but the fire and bronze of understood history.” Herzen in contrast “had no abstract theory,” he “glanced, saw, searched, cried, suffered together with all the figures of the drama of history” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 151). Brzozowski made productive use of his own literary imagination (not to mention his literary erudition), in order to comprehend sympathetically Herzen's critical interventions. On the other hand, however, when drawing up the balance of the political and literary works of the Russian author, Brzozowski noted that the former eventually did not meet the challenge posed by historical circumstances: In a certain moment of his life Herzen lost his belief in the human community, he was cut off from the life of this community, and he, as Brzozowski put it, “remained alone with his proud dream of an artist and thus will he remain in history” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 169).

The link between literature and the sphere of the political was for Brzozowski an epistemological assumption as well as a hermeneutic method serving to analyze this very link. In *Voices in the Night* we read:

To understand and to classify the forms of real relations in which a human individual can find himself in today with respect to the surrounding society, is the only method to understand philosophy, literature, art, etc. (Brzozowski 2007, p. 164)

It seems as if Brzozowski did not want or was not able to decide which element should be of primary importance here: whether social relations dominate culture (as is suggested in the quote above) or whether culture in one form or another determines the shape and structure of a collectivity. Commenting on Herzen's conception of the rural community in Russia, Brzozowski assumed that “its fate and future depend entirely on the changes and differentiations that will occur in Russia's general cultural system” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 167). The same can be said, only to a higher degree, about Poland, where “social development depends up to the present day on books” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 167).

The emotional pathos, the expressiveness, and enthusiasm which are so characteristic of Brzozowski's writings on literature and culture can be fully explained only by assuming that literature (and therefore also literary criticism) retains the means to reconstruct not only human consciousness and individual personalities but the 'world' as a whole. In *The Legend of Young Poland* we read:

The institutions are not in our hands, virtually the only force depending on us is literature: may it at least act in our direction, may it bring about that to be a Pole means: to have present to one's consciousness a maximum of talents for a highly strung and creative life, that means: to love passionately, tenaciously and fiercely one's intense existence. (Brzozowski 1997, p. 201)

Conclusion: fragments of a context-sensitive theory of literature

How exactly can literature "act," how exactly can it help its readers to achieve these "capacities for a highly strung and creative life"? From the perspective of contemporary literary criticism one is tempted to locate these questions in the framework of reader-response criticism or literary sociology. It is not my intention to describe this as the hidden *telos* of Brzozowski's conception. But if we think of what Brzozowski wrote about the role of culture and literature as creative achievements³ which serve as an expression of the self-consciousness of a nation, then it seems only natural to pose the question of how exactly he conceived the impact of literature on a given community. As I pointed out earlier, this question is widely neglected in his critical writings. Apparently Brzozowski assumed this impact as self-evident. In his introduction to *The Contemporary Polish Novel* (1906) he used the vague term "atmosphere" in order to describe the devastating influence exerted on the Polish public by contemporary novelists (Brzozowski 1990b, p. 370). But there are some passages in his later writings in which he treated these problems more or less explicitly. Thus in the last, unfinished sketch of his *Voices in the Night*, which deals with the works of Joseph Conrad, Brzozowski argued that a "novelist educates his readers" (Brzozowski 2007, p. 292). The secret of the impact of literary works on culture and society is at least partly revealed in this statement, in particular if we look at the very last sentence of this essay: "Balzac must educate the political, religious I, which experiences the incidents of his works in a dramatic, passionate, active way" (Brzozowski 2007, p. 292). Of course, it is the phrase "political, religious I" that I find intriguing. I would argue that there is a direct line between this "political, religious I" and the "community" or the "nation" Brzozowski wrote about so ostentatiously; for "political I" means nothing else than a relation between the self and a broader community, a relation that is based on common experiences, common political and religious convictions and sentiments.⁴ In this fragmentary

³ Cf. Brzozowski's discussion of the notion of "achievement" in *Voices in the Night* (Brzozowski 2007, pp. 245, 251).

⁴ Unfortunately, the scope of the present article does not allow me to discuss the crucial role attributed to issues of religion and Catholicism in Brzozowski's late writings.

sketch Brzozowski conceptualized the nation as a receptive community, a community which is, so to say, *formed* by a novelist.

The “mystic core,” which Brzozowski located at the foundations of the national community is then literature—as a common horizon of reference, a common denominator for the creation of its past and future identity (cf. Brzozowski 1990b, p. 367). The “nation” appears as a community imagined by the authors of literary texts. The somewhat circular structure we can detect in Brzozowski's ideas on literature and the community is brought to a logical closure here, but only at the cost of removing extra-literary contexts. This becomes clear when we read Brzozowski's statements on the “classical” features of the contemporary English novel: “Here the fatherland is seen as our everyday reality.” At the same time he speaks of the “deep modernity of this literature,” because it “sees the concrete psychic character of this reality which recognizes itself in it” (Brzozowski 2007, p. 291). The peaceful everyday life in England (as imagined by Stanisław Brzozowski on the basis of the poetry of Robert Browning, the essays of Matthew Arnold, and the novels of George Meredith) is the normal case of a modern society which has found its identity. The side effects of this idyllic image of undisturbed conscious self-creation do not seem to have irritated Brzozowski. Still it is important to point out, that in his view English society appears to be deprived of chaotic shifts and interactions between the social sphere and the world of art and literature. This society is a highly telling projection, obviously designed to serve as a kind of exemplary role model for Brzozowski's Polish compatriots.⁵ That is why the stillness of his lines devoted to English literature is so contrary to the frenetic outbursts of *The Legend of Young Poland*. He was not able to offer an equally neat theoretical solution for Poland, where society, culture, and modern identity were still in the making. The chaotic form and structure of his critical writings testifies to his theoretical sensitivity: Brzozowski knew that the paraphrasing criticism of the positivist epoch, as it was still practiced by many of his peers, was a dead end. He was aware of the social factors that have to be taken into account if we do not want to understand literary and intellectual history either as free floating unhistorical Platonic ‘ideas’ or as an assembly of some superhuman geniuses. But he did not have the time to properly develop his ideas. It is as fascinating as it is useless to imagine what Brzozowski would have achieved had he been granted the five more years he dreamt of in a letter to his friends Rafał and Wula Buber three months before his death on April 10, 1911 (Brzozowski 1970, vol. 2, p. 562).

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⁵ Cf. the essay “On the Educational Significance of English Literature” from *Voices in the Night* (Brzozowski 2007, pp. 245–257).

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